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Seth Bernard. 2018. Building in mid-Republican Rome: labor, architecture, and the urban economy. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 978-0-19-087878-8 £ 55

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Any academic publication that I enjoy reading ends up with many scribbles, notes and comments in pencil. The ancient historian Seth Bernard wrote such a book and some critical remarks provided below, are subordinate to its overall, substantial qualities. His manuscript forms essential reading for those interested in the expanding political-economic sophistication of Rome in between 396 and 168 BC; from the capture of the Etruscan city-state Veii till the end of the Third Macedonian War. As Bernard argues, mid-Republican Rome is frequently taken for granted or even marginalized while it is an essential episode in the development of town. The period chosen allows him to tackle in seven chapters a number of widespread views that are problematic set against the increasing weight of the Roman state from the 4th till early 2nd century BC. He does so by combining archaeological data with an elegant but critical review of the existing ancient literature and inscriptions. Hence he creates in Chapter 3 an intricate argument to counter the complete destruction of the town during the Gallic sack around 390 BC as later recorded by Livy and others, while he deconstructs in Chapter 6 the notion that labour supply was predominantly slave-based in Rome during the 3rd century BC. Instead he makes a case for artisans of different origin and statuses that goes hand in hand with the rapid urban progress during this century. With reason, Bernard rejects natural growth of the urban population by sanitation and increasing survival rates of infants. Instead he documents immigration of craftsmen from various regions attracted by a rising demand for skilled labour in Rome. This coincides with recent comparative studies into early state formation of pre-industrial societies detailing that population growth in thriving capitals prior to the 19th century AD hinges often on nucleation, relocation and immigration.

The heart of the book, in terms of evidence, is a catalogue of public building projects (appendix two of 22 pages). This is a fundamental dataset given the quality of the existing

evidence for the period both in ancient texts and archaeology. Such catalogues of numerous temple foundations but including fortifications, aqueducts and roads, were published before but obtain significance due to the holistic handling by Bernard. Nonetheless this inventory is somewhat capricious since it records one type of activity, that of buildings controlled by the state. Most civilizations, though, consist of much more than the state arrangements. The Roman *gentes* as a social-economic establishment will have lost some of its significance during this period but would still make up a significant part of the mid-Republican economy. The limited number of public building projects during most of the 4th century BC lead Bernard and others to stress the social tensions and even waning of Rome (the word ‘stalled’ is used on page 74). A decline of Rome is however not detectable. Given events such as the Gallic invasion or the strain caused by the incorporation of Veii and its territory within the Roman state, it is quite an achievement that one could maintain what already existed and even expand, for example by the construction of the extensive Republican circuit walls in the years around 390-380 BC. Moreover the emphasis on growth makes one wonder how this is defined. It is surreal to expect a constant rate of development over centuries of Roman expansion while by any standard, the increase in territory and population due to the conquest of the city-state Veii, would represent for most scholars a considerable upsurge in economic substance. This might not be reflected in public building projects in Rome itself, assuming that all were recorded for the 4th century BC.

Chapter 4 *A Cost Analysis of the Republican Circuit Walls* is for me questionable since it is speculative and relies much on A, instead of *The Cost Analysis* The content of the chapter could have been improved by providing some options depending on a couple of variables in the analysis. As it stands it ends up with one figure; in total 6.8 million person-days work (Table 4.3, page 98). The benefit of the chapter is that it specifies the enormous investments in resources and labour by erecting the substantial fortifications encircling Rome for 11 km. Some of the questions that popped up while reading this fascinating chapter are;

- Why are the subjected Veians merely involved in the mining of the almost 1 million blocks of Grotta Oscura tuff, each weighing on average almost 230 kg, and not in their subsequent transport to Rome and/or in most of the unskilled labour during the actual construction in Rome itself?
- Is it credible that the circuit walls were uniform in appearance given the wide-ranging differences in geophysics of the terrain encompassing the seven main hills of ancient Rome, bordering the Tiber? Bernard could have given some alternatives such as

monumental *agger* and *fossa* only at those sections of the circuit walls where the terrain had no natural defences, for example, in between the hills and on the Esquiline.

Elsewhere, in the vicinity of Rome, walls were erected along the steep sides of the hills/plateaux of settlements without much of the earthworks required for the *aggeres* and this might be probable for some sections of the Roman circuit walls as well.

This exercise provided for the early 4th century BC circuit walls becomes problematic when one can read on page 169 that such analyses are speculative before the later second century due to state of the evidence and thus not given for other public buildings. Despite these comments, I found this chapter most informative.

To close this short review, I once more would like to point to some of the main benefits of the book. Many of the topics addressed, intertwine in several chapters which render the arguments given more persuasive. Thus the introduction of coinage during the 3rd century BC and the need for contracted labour are correlated. The variety of tuffs and their physical characteristics is another recurring theme and with the expanding territory of the Roman state different types of tuffs became available and employed skilfully. It all adds up to a vivid description of the mounting sophistication of Rome during the mid-Republican period. The book is excellent; ably presented, wide-ranging as well as intricate.